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THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL,  
ITS FUTURE AND IMPACT ON MIDDLE EAST STABILITY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ARNOLD FIELDS

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In May of this year, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will celebrate its eighth anniversary. Principally formed to consolidate the economic interests of six Persian Gulf states--Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)--the GCC has evolved into an astute political instrument with ever increasing military power. Fearful that the Iran-Iraq war would spread to the Western Gulf, the level of cooperation between the GCC states transcended age-old rivalries and unsettled disputes. Now that the Gulf war has subsided, these old rivalries and disputes may surface, and superpower initiatives may cause major regional policy changes. This paper seeks to broadly analyze the past, present and future role of the GCC in the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf region. It first addresses the social threats endemic to each GCC state and the threats to stability they pose. Next, the paper provides a broad historical perspective of U.S.-Persian Gulf regional policy including how it evolved and how the Iranian revolution caused it to be reevaluated. Finally, the paper suggests that the void left by the demise of the "twin pillars" policy has not been filled and that allowing the GCC to become a de facto U.S. surrogate is not in the best interest of regional stability.

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THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL,  
ITS FUTURE AND IMPACT ON MIDDLE EAST STABILITY

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

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# ABSTRACT

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THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL  
ITS FUTURE AND IMPACT ON MIDDLE EAST STABILITY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

International alliances are time-tested political mechanisms through which nations have engendered economic prosperity and military security. Although often considered worn-out and over-used, the time-honored cliché of "together we stand and divided we fall" remains very much in vogue. The bipolar world in which nations must now cope discourages the proclivity toward isolation. Communist expansion and dwindling natural resources are key factors which encourage "brotherly love" where there exist political, cultural, economic and social differences that could easily make relations much less tenable. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance is an excellent example. Several of the 16 nations of which the alliance is comprised were at various points in their history at odds with each other. Yet out of the animosity and chaos, with which U.S. and European history is replete, has come an international agreement that has served as the mainstay of U.S. and Western Europe strategic security for over four decades. The road has not been easy, and the NATO alliance is under more pressure today than ever before. But it remains a model organization for other less developed and less economically and militarily secure nations to emulate.

Alliances do have their liabilities. In addition to an often encumbered decision process and fragile inter-member relationship, nations must often cope with decisions that may not always be in their best interest, but on which they will agree in order to maintain accord. Then there is the other case where nations elect to withdraw from alliances rather than be a party to certain initiatives. Alliance partners also have the propensity to intimidate and to isolate other nations. Often the national interest that binds one group of nations is the very nemesis of others.

Under the NATO umbrella, the European arena is fairly stable and reasonably secure. But what about putting the Persian Gulf region under the "umbrella" of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)? The study addresses the GCC in the context of its perceived contribution to regional stability and to ensuring the security of U.S. vital interests in the area.



## CHAPTER II

### THE GCC, BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Persian Gulf has been a hotbed of conflict for decades, but the Iran-Iraq war brought uncommon attention and political scrutiny to this vital area of the world. The continuation and escalation of the war, together with Iran's unrelenting efforts to intimidate its neighbors, created dangerous instability which challenged both the interests of the U.S. and of the contiguous Gulf states. While the aggregate impact of such concerns did not reach fruition until the mid-80's, the six western Gulf states had the vision to pool their mutual economic and security concerns and form the GCC.

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates(UAE) are the six nations which comprise the GCC. Formed on 26 May 1981, the basic objectives of the GCC, as expressed in Article 4 of its charter, are:

1. To achieve cooperation among the member states in all fields as a prelude to unity.
2. To strengthen the links of cooperation among the peoples of the member states in different fields.
3. To establish similar systems among the member states in all fields, including economics and finance; commerce, customs and communications; education and culture; social welfare and health; information and tourism; and legislation and administration.
4. To stimulate scientific and technological progress in the fields of industry, mineralogy, agriculture, and marine and animal resources. To establish common projects, and to encourage the cooperation of the private sector for the common good of the peoples of the member states.<sup>1</sup>

Neither oil nor national security is mentioned, but in the aggregate of considerations, these almost certainly were the major concerns which bound together this culturally similar group of Arab nations. A brief description of each GCC state follows.

Bahrain, an island nation with a population of slightly less than a half million, gained its independence from Great Britain in 1971. Its first Parliament was elected at the end of 1973 and dissolved in 1975. Today the Emir (ruler) exercises absolute authority over a governmental structure based upon Islamic laws. Islam is the principal religion, with 60 percent of the population Shiite and 40 percent Sunni. The ruling family is of the Sunnie sect. Since governmental policy mandates universal education, the literacy rate is relatively high.<sup>2</sup>

An oil exporting state since 1934, Bahrain contains .02 percent of the proven world oil reserves. Petroleum exports account for more than half of the government's income. Although natural gas for domestic industry is plentiful, oil exports will cease in the mid-90s, when existing known reserves will have been depleted. Bahrain leaders and their GCC will soon have to contend with this issue; it is not their only concern.

In December 1981, less than a year after the GCC was formally inaugurated, a plot by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) to overthrow the government was uncovered. This was apparently contrived by Iran, which

claims Bahrain as its territory.<sup>3</sup> A previous assertion of Iranian sovereignty over Bahrain had been made during the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> And in the 1950s Iran's then prime minister threatened to send an expeditionary force to recover the islands, at the time under special treaty relationship with Great Britain.

In January 1968, Britain's announcement to withdraw all of its military forces from the Gulf brought the issue of Bahrain once more to the fore. After an initial period of tenseness, the Shah decided not to press his claim to Bahrain. Instead he agreed that the people of Bahrain should determine their own political future, and subsequently a fact-finding mission from the United Nations declared that the Bahrainis wanted an independent state. Bahrain declared independence in August 1971 and was immediately recognized by Iran.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the successor to the Shah's regime, the Islamic Republic, has revived Iran's claim.

Kuwait, at the northern flank of the GCC, has a population of approximately 1.7 million, although less than half are actual Kuwaiti citizens. Originally a protectorate of Great Britain, Kuwait gained its independence in 1961. Internal conflict among the ruling family, coupled with occasional political unrest among the masses, "watered down" the constitutional mandate, until in 1986 the Parliament was dissolved by the Emir, in whom now rests absolute authority. Judicial matters are generally executed within the confines of Islamic law.<sup>6</sup>

During the Iran-Iraq war, Kuwait (which shares a border

with Iraq and Saudi Arabia) provided financial aid to Iraq, and as a result, was the major focus of Iranian gun boat attacks in the Persian Gulf in 1987-88.

Kuwait, with a land mass of only 7,780 square miles, enjoys a healthy percentage of the world's proven oil reserves, and a relatively high standard of living enriches Kuwaiti citizens who boast one of the largest per capita incomes in the world. At the same time, the war has cut into Kuwait's affluence, since many potential foreign investors have steered clear of the Gulf. Kuwait remains economically strong, however; wise overseas investments by the Kuwaitis continue to generate cash. Indeed, returns from foreign assets are competitive with those from oil.<sup>8</sup>

Oman, the second largest of the six GCC states has demonstrated strong commitment to the West, which makes it something of a political maverick in the Persian Gulf region. The "moral courage" Oman displayed in endorsing the Camp David Accords and in refusing to sever relations with Egypt, despite the outcry of her Islamic neighbors, was indicative of its independent foreign policy.

Oman has had a long, tumultuous history. Internal leadership disputes and border clashes with South Yemen have beset the country, until the recent emergence of a strong ruler, the Sultan of Oman. Although there exists a 45-member State Advisory Council, there is no constitution or Parliament. The sultan legislates by decree.

The dominate force in the economy is oil, but like

Bahrain Oman's share of the world's oil reserves, at .05 billion, is very modest. Further, it is believed that unless new discoveries are made, petroleum resources will be depleted during the next 20 years.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most salient example of Oman's independence is its decision to abstain from joining the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC). By so doing, she avoids compliance with OPEC/OAPEC oil production quota systems. Crude oil output is adjusted to ensure a steady inflow of petroleum revenues. The result of this arrangement has been a generally stable economy with continuously funded domestic programs.<sup>10</sup>

Among Omani leaders there is rising concern about the degree to which foreigners are able to influence the government. They wish not to be a surrogate for any super power, and are suspected to be unreceptive to Washington's bid for basing rights. Further, many Omanis (particularly the young and well educated) feel that too much of the budget goes toward purchasing foreign weapons.<sup>11</sup> These factors, together with the one-man rule policy, could portend trouble for this very pro-U.S. Arab state.

Qatar, a peninsula state about the size of Connecticut, has a population of a quarter-million, but only 70,000 are native-born. An independent state since 1970, Qatar refused to join the British-sponsored federation of Arab Emirates. In part this was due to Qatar's close ties to Saudi Arabia;

they are the only two Gulf states whose leaders adhere to the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam (a strong Islamic fundamentalist element).

Qatar's major exports are oil and natural gas. With only .05 percent of the total world's oil reserves, this asset will soon be depleted, but known natural gas reserves of at least 150 trillion cubic feet could ensure continued economic stability.

Boundary disputes with the UAE and with Bahrain over ownership of Hawar, an island off Qatar's coast, remain issues; however, Qatar is unlikely to provoke a confrontation with its neighbors, at least as long as revenues are maintained and the indigenous population remains quiescent.<sup>12</sup>

The UAE represents the longest surviving federation of Arab states. Inclusive in its population of just more than a million are the indigenous inhabitants who make up only one-quarter of the total. Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Ajman and Umm al-Quaiwan are the seven emirates of the UAE. Each has its own character and, to a large extent, its own national agenda. Fierce competition often at the expense of national unity is common between the emirates. Absent a strong central government, planning tends to be haphazard and major projects, such as airports, are often unnecessarily duplicated. The \$21,340 per capita income of UAE citizens is one of the highest in the world, and 4.6 percent of the world's oil reserves should ensure

continued prosperity.<sup>13</sup>

Saudi Arabia, the largest of the six GCC states, has a population of approximately 15.5 million. Like its GCC neighbors, foreigners make up a large percentage of the nation's labor force. Pakistanis, South Koreans, and Filipinos are present in great numbers. All Saudis are Arab Muslims, as are over half of its expatriate population. Over 90 percent of the Saudis who are citizens adhere to the Wahhabi sect. The remainder are Shiites, most of whom reside in the Eastern province. Non-Muslims are prohibited from public worship.

Economically, militarily and politically, Saudi Arabia is one of the most influential powers in the region. The world's third largest oil producer and largest oil exporter, Saudi Arabia realized a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$126.8 billion in 1983 and a per capita income of \$15,645 during that same year.<sup>14</sup> Declining oil exports have reduced Saudi Arabia's wealth. In 1987, its GDP was \$85 billion and its per capita income \$6,030.<sup>15</sup>

Militarily, Saudi Arabia is strong, compared to other GCC states. Saudi armed forces consist of approximately 82,000 men, including a 10,000-man National Guard. Sophisticated weapons systems, such as F-15D fighter aircraft, E-3A airborne early warning systems, and MAVERICK air-to-surface missiles, raise the military capability of the Saudi regime. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has had a special military relationship with the U.S. since the late

1940s, although British and French military missions are also present in the country.

Saudi Arabia's vast wealth is controlled by a highly centralized, monarchical form of government. The king functions as the highest authority in all aspects of governing, guided by senior family members. Western forms of political expression (political parties, labor unions, etc.) are forbidden.

Saudi Arabia has emerged as an important actor in the volatile politics of the Middle East. But its traditional importance in the area stems not from its political but rather its religious status as the home of the Prophet Muhammad. The Saudis are the guardians of Mecca and Medina--the two holiest sites of Islam--and host the annual pilgrimage (The Haj) which all Muslims, at least once in their lives, should make to these shrines.<sup>17</sup>

The spread of Khomeinism has somewhat undermined Saudi Arabia's regional influence. Indeed one might conclude that the awakening of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran poses the greatest threat to Saudi Arabia in recent history. In the wake of this, and of the end of the Gulf war, Saudi Arabia may have to find new ways by which to project its regional influence.

In summary, the GCC states have made great strides in cooperation since 1981. Most notably, they have been able to shape their governments along similar lines. They share a similar culture, and thus tend to adopt similar approaches



to political matters. Islam and the tribe are the mainstays of their systems. At the same time, because their political systems are influenced only minimally by democratic procedures, the potential exists for much internal unrest. A system of severe punishment for "crimes against the government" discourages internal agitation, although violence does occasionally occur.<sup>18</sup>

Wealth is an obvious asset to the GCC states, but it is also a liability. The positive aspects need little elaboration. They essentially translate into technological and social developments that increase the quality of life of the Gulf Arabs. The negative impact of wealth is much more insidious and thereby difficult to categorize.

One of the most salient tasks of GCC regimes has been to maintain internal stability. National wealth has stimulated dangerous passions. Minority groups and expatriate laborers are viewed as susceptible to external forces, such as Khomeinism.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, increasing numbers of GCC residents are being educated in western institutions. Inspired by western freedoms, unencumbered by strict Islamic doctrine and family rule, many of the younger generation have begun to question traditional systems.<sup>20</sup> The resilience and political astuteness of GCC regimes will continue to be tested by such forces.

The remarkable economic transformation of the GCC states, in a relatively short period of time, has made them a focus of international politics. The GCC states are

clearly a concern of the superpowers, a position that the states neither desire nor have intentionally encouraged. Historically, the GCC states have tried to deflect attention from themselves. They have resisted serving as surrogates of the Soviet Union and the U.S.

Another potential threat to the GCC is the position of Iraq, the alliance's northern neighbor. The Iraqis would like to join the GCC, but have been excluded. Iraq considers that by its war against Iran it preserved the security of the Gulf. But to the six GCC states, Iraq has always been viewed as a regional threat. Iraq previously tried to annex Kuwait, and still has an unresolved border dispute with that country. Perhaps equally disturbing is the fact that the Iraqis are republicans rather than monarchists. Their socialist ideology and alleged hegemonic ambitions have produced friction between them and their moderate Arab neighbors.<sup>21</sup>

Iran similarly has been excluded from the GCC. Persian Iran pursued aggressive policies toward the GCC throughout the war. At one point in 1986 it appeared on the point of invading Kuwait. Thus there is little likelihood either Iran or Iraq will ever become members of the GCC.<sup>23</sup>

The GCC is therefore considerably encumbered with internal problems, including political, social, and economic, that its enormous wealth may not be able to help it transcend. In fact, it is the wealth, to a large extent, that has precipitated many of its current problems. The

internal concerns are exacerbated by a great number of external factors with which the GCC must learn to cope, if it is to remain a viable regional organization playing in the world arena.

#### ENDNOTES

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7. Anthony H. Cordesman, The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security 1984-87: Strategic Implications and Policy Options, p. 14.
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22. Thomas Naff, ed., Gulf Security and the Iran-Iraq War, pp. 148-149.

23. Sandwick, p. 171.

## CHAPTER III

### U.S. POLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE PERSIAN GULF

The Vietnam war impinged greatly upon U.S. capability to implement foreign policy in other troubled areas of the world. The Middle East was no exception. The war took its toll on the U.S. economy to the extent that foreign policy initiatives involving monetary investments had to be rethought. More creative means of securing U.S. interests had to be devised.<sup>1</sup>

The incoming Nixon administration sought to resolve this dilemma by proposing a new and fairly radical formula. Nixon announced in June 1969 that regional powers would have to take an increased responsibility for their collective security. The U.S. would participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but would not design all of the programs nor make all of the decisions that apply to the defense of the free nations. Help would be provided only when such help would make a difference and U.S. interests would benefit. A more cautious and less exposed world role for the U.S. resulted. This revised foreign policy approach was appropriately referred to as the Nixon Doctrine.<sup>2</sup> The Middle East was the first major recipient.

The British announcement in 1968 to withdraw their forces from the Persian Gulf by 1971 ushered in the first test case. The U.S., still deeply involved in the Vietnam war, had neither the military manpower, economic stability, nor public support to fill the void left by the British.

But it was in the best interest of the U.S that a friendly power should seize the initiative. The approach taken by the U.S. was to build strong Middle East allies to obviate the necessity for involving U.S. troops. Iran and Saudi Arabia, at that time the two most stable and powerful regional states, were selected to be the chief U.S.-Middle East surrogates. This "twin pillars" policy suggested that Iran would provide stability by opposing Soviet ambitions, on the east bank of the Gulf, and Saudi Arabia would ensure the collective stability of the Saudi Peninsula. Ethnic, religious, and nationalistic rivalries inhibited Iranian-Saudi cooperation; therefore, the intended impact of this political juxtapositioning never reached fruition, although some positive returns were gleaned.

A massive arms build-up of Iran gave "teeth" to the twin pillars concept, and by the time the British had withdrawn from the Gulf in 1971, Iran had become a formidable regional military power. To further solidify matters, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his National Security Adviser, met with the Shah of Iran during May 1972. The result was a radical restructuring of the U.S.-Iranian relationship. In addition to a sustained flow of weapons, the U.S. agreed to substantially increase the number of uniformed U.S. advisers and technicians serving in Iran. This initiative was in view of the wide selection of highly sophisticated aircraft, naval vessels, tanks, missiles, "smart bombs", and self-propelled artillery purchased by Iran. In return, the Shah accepted his principal role in

protecting western regional interests.<sup>3</sup> Nixon allowed the Shah a "blank check" in weapons purchases. In effect, the Nixon administration's policy was to accede to any of the Shah's requests for arms purchases from the U.S., except certain sophisticated advanced technology armaments and nuclear weapons. This weapons initiative was unprecedented, as was the overall decision to place the bulk of vital U.S. regional interests in the trust of one nation.

On the west bank of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia also experienced a quantum jump in military expenditures. In 1973, total Saudi defense expenditures were about \$3.7 billion. By 1978, both Iran and Saudi defense expenditures had jumped to over \$10 billion.<sup>4</sup> In addition to strengthening the Saudi armed forces, the U.S. reaped an economic windfall by finding a means through which to "recycle petro-dollars". As a result, Saudi defense programs blossomed during the 1970s. The weapons flow (particularly in the case of Iran) was almost unimpeded. The glamour of aviation, for example, appealed greatly to young Saudi princes who took part in aviation training. This proclivity was undoubtedly instrumental in the large sale of aircraft and anti-aircraft systems to the Saudis. Very close working relationships between the Saudi government and major U.S. corporations (Northrup for example) were engendered. Between 1976 and 1980, Northrup sales to Saudi Arabia averaged over \$1.2 billion, 22 to 24 percent of its total sales. Similarly, there were significant increases in Saudi

Navy and National Guard expenditures. By 1977, costs relating to these forces had reached \$2 billion, almost 2,000 percent above original estimates.<sup>5</sup> Although blamed on an overly ambitious Saudi military improvement project, together with a complement of inexperienced U.S. foreign program advisers, it is conceivable that U.S. corporations took unnecessary advantage of the lucrative oil-based Saudi economy and of the Saudis' lack of sophistication in high-tech military matters.<sup>6</sup>

All this expansion of military means was deceptive, however, since both Saudi Arabia and Iran remained fundamentally weak. Neither state had developed reliable political institutions and thus in an emergency the respective regimes were liable to dysfunction.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Yonah Alexander and Allen Names, ed., The United States and Iran, a Documentary History, p. 376.

2. Ibid.

3. Gary Sick, All Fall Down, America's Tragic Encounter with Iran, pp. 13-14.

4. David E. Long, The United States and Saudi Arabia, Ambivalent Allies, p. 58.

5. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

6. Ibid.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE FIRST PILLAR FALLS

As late as November 1978, the U.S. still could not or would not "read the hand-writing on the wall". President Carter, in a Presidential interview with Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting Company, said: "We look on the Shah ... as a friend, a loyal ally, and the good relationship that Iran has had and has now with ourselves and with the other democracies in the world, the Western powers, as being very constructive and valuable ... having a strong and independent Iran in the area is a very stabilizing factor, and we would hate to see it disrupted by violence and the government fall with an unpredictable result."<sup>1</sup> But in the end, Iran turned out to be the nemesis of the Carter administration. The U.S. apparently was led to believe that Iran was powerful because of its armed might. In fact, U.S. purchased arms were of little effectiveness combatting the anti-Shah forces that were mobilizing inside Iran.

The Shah, declaring war upon ancient religious and social customs, tried to undo in a few years what had taken centuries to develop. This triggered a revolt by rebellious traditionalists which the Shah tried to curb with his feared and hated secret police known as SAVAK (the Farsi-language acronym for National Security and Information Organization). Given wide latitude to locate and intimidate political enemies of the Shah, SAVAK conducted essentially unlimited warfare against organizations perceived to be in opposition

to the Shah's regime.<sup>2</sup>

The Shah believed that Washington would welcome such a crackdown. Instead SAVAK's activity brought harsh criticism from powerful interests in the U.S. and from groups like Amnesty International. Sensitive to the growing concern in Washington, the Shah moved to introduce judicial reforms while reducing the number of political prisoners (at one point estimated at 2,800-3,500). This show of moderation only spurred the anti-Shah forces to greater excesses. Months of civil unrest followed, during which a broad-based movement emerged. Led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, this movement ended the 37-year reign of the Shah. The new government quickly turned against the U.S., even though President Carter tried to befriend the Khomeini forces. A new government and, to a large extent, a new way of life had begun to take shape.

Then on 22 September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran in response to lingering border disputes and political rivalry. Attempting to seize the southwestern Iranian oil area or "Arabistan", Baghdad launched massive air raids against Iranian air bases, but with little military effect. This event marked the genesis of a devastating war that would last for 8 years and be the cause of over a million casualties. It would create a chasm between Iran and other Persian Gulf Islamic states, while bringing the U.S. to the brink of all-out war with its former staunch ally. In fact, many of the very weapons used against the U.S. during

skirmishes in the Gulf with Iran were U.S.-made.

It quickly became apparent that the U.S. could not recoup its privileged position in Iran after the fall of the Shah. Indeed his demise erected a considerable power vacuum in the Gulf which the U.S. had to expeditiously find some means to fill.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Alexander and Nanes, p. 431.
2. "Iran", The Middle East, Sixth Edition, pp. 186-187.

## CHAPTER V

### THE UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND (USCENTCOM)

It is argued among some noted scholars that the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) was not exclusively a precipitant from the untimely demise of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not there is a reason upon which to base such an argument, it is clear that the rapidity with which the RDF was formed was in recognition of an acute security void in the Persian Gulf and in Southwest Asia. Iran and Afghanistan were geopolitically important to the U.S., and control over both had been lost.

In his State of the Union Address of January 1980, President Carter pledged that any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region would be repelled by any means necessary, including military force. This was a strong assertion that needed bodies and weapons to make it meaningful. In order to do so, a massive effort was launched to build a viable fighting organization. Four central building programs were necessary: strategic mobility, command and control, facility access and allied cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

Nine years have passed since the birth of the RDF on 1 March 1980. Slightly more than a modicum of improvement has been realized in its capability to fulfill its strategic role. The divisive problem of command and control was largely resolved with the creation of the U.S. Central Command on 1 January 1983. With its own geographic

responsibilities, service components, forces, intelligence, communications, logistics facilities and other supporting elements, USCENTCOM was the first geographically unified command to be created in 35 years.

Progress in sealift, prepositioning, and airlift enhancement of existing aircraft has improved strategic mobility, but uncertainty remains over long-term initiatives such as the C-X (C-17) transport aircraft whose presence in the transport inventory may be years away. The bottom line is this: assets simply don't exist that will provide the kind of quick response the original RDF concept required.

Basing rights remain inadequate. This is perhaps the most difficult problem with which USCENTCOM must contend. The original RDF concept incorporated an intervention capability which required minimum dependence on foreign bases. But, once again, inadequate strategic lift undermined this requirement. It became imperative for the U.S. to secure regional facilities that could support enroute transit, sea control, peacetime presence, rear staging and forward operating.<sup>3</sup> To accomplish such an objective, particularly in an Arab environment, would require the U.S. to negotiate a jungle of regional problems involving sovereignty, political sensitivities and substantial construction work. Other than naval facilities in Bahrain, the U.S. has been able to gain access only to certain facilities in Oman and then only in the event of war (four airfields and two sea ports are included in this

concession). Although access has been granted, the sultan reserves the right to be informed when such bases are to be used. This is just one example of the fragile nature of such Middle East agreements. Facilities agreements have also been made with the contiguous states of Kenya and Somalia, and in some cases, rights have been secured with Egypt, Israel, Pakistan and Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

Allied cooperation in the Persian Gulf remains a very sensitive issue. Stemming largely from the importance of Gulf oil to Europe, which receives 30 percent, approximately, of its supply from the area, sentiment among some U.S. decision makers inclines toward the view that the Europeans (vis-a-vis NATO) should take a proactive role in the defense of the Persian Gulf. This proposal has generated more rhetoric from Western allies than cooperation, although Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy eventually sent ships to the Persian Gulf during the reflagging. A major factor inhibiting Europe from acting more aggressively is that European ties with the Gulf are much more complex than those of the U.S. The Europeans have yet to live down the reputation as colonialists and economic exploiters, and therefore have to fear terrorist reprisals. Also, Europe's relative neutrality in the Arab-Israeli arena has won her economic rewards from the Arabs, which she is unwilling to lose. Summing up, the European relationship with the Gulf is such that the U.S. must not expect help from that quarter.<sup>5</sup> So, to whom should the U.S. turn for help? Is the GCC the best avenue of approach?

# ENDNOTES

1. Amitav Achaiya, "The Rapid Deployment Force and the U.S. Military Build-up in the Persian Gulf Region: A Critical Perspective", The Australian Journal of International Affairs, August 1984, pp. 91-92.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 94.

4. Ibid, p. 96.

5. Ibid.

## CHAPTER VI

### IS THE GCC A DEPENDABLE ALLY?

Now that the hostilities between Iran and Iraq, the two Persian Gulf superpowers, have subsided, there needs to be renewed effort toward finding a means by which to ensure regional stability. Obviously, returning to the twin pillars policy is impossible at present. An alternative approach, suggested by some U.S. officials, is to view the GCC as the balancer among Iraq and Iran, the other players in this regional threesome. But experts question this for several reasons.

First, the GCC does not constitute the monolithic whole necessary to fulfill a balancer role. Each GCC country's history is replete with disputes, either internally or with bordering GCC states. Lack of democracy (as opposed to one-man rule) contributes to popular unrest. These and other factors combine to make the various GCC states very fragile entities.

Secondly, the role of U.S. surrogate does not appeal to the GCC.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Council has repeatedly called for Oman's disassociation with CENTCOM's access network (at least this is the sentiment in times of non-crisis).<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, the complex cultural and religious ties with Iran and Iraq (animosity notwithstanding) virtually preclude the GCC states acting against either nation on behalf of a western power, particularly the U.S.

Finally, and most unsettling, is that the GCC states



are undergoing some of the same social changes that precipitated the Iranian revolution. The "old guard" and the "new guard" (the converging Islamic fundamentalists and the western educated Arabs) will eventually have to reconcile substantial differences. And when this happens, the fervor "could make the Iran-Iraq war look like child's play", as stated by R. K. Ramazani, Government and Foreign Affairs professor and Director of the Gulf Cooperation Studies Project at the University of Virginia. Professor Ramazani argues that because the Gulf war did not escalate, did not seriously disrupt Gulf oil supplies nor impair U.S. regional diplomatic relations, there now exists a "business as usual" attitude among U.S. policy makers. He suggests that the current "peace" between Iran and Iraq is extremely fragile (as a historical perspective will corroborate) and subject to "renegotiation" at any moment. He adds that chemical warfare and sophisticated missiles will be the order of the day. Professor Ramazani concludes that the unprecedented regional arms race makes this prognosis inevitable.<sup>3</sup>

The United States may already have invested too much in building GCC military forces. As in Iran, the tides can change so rapidly that virtually overnight an ally can become an enemy. Were the GCC states to come under pressure from fundamentalist influences in the Gulf, they might quickly decide to distance themselves from association with the U.S.

So, to rest the security of the U.S. Persian Gulf interests in the hands of the GCC offers more liabilities than assets. Although it continues to improve its intra-organizational relationships, the GCC remains at best a fragile alliance that, due to a plethora of unresolved issues, is not ready to assume such a grave responsibility. Moreover, the whole idea of a surrogate role for the GCC, in the current Arab political climate, simply doesn't wash.

#### ENDNOTES

1. R. A. Ramazani, "Gulf Peace and Security: Rethinking U.S. Policy", Middle East Insight, Fall 1988, p. 4.
2. Achaiya, p. 95.
3. Ramazani, p. 3.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that the Gulf war directly influenced the ultimate formalization of the GCC agreement. While there had been efforts to organize the Gulf littoral states for some time, a "significant emotional event" was needed to help transcend the dilemma of who should be a member. The Iran-Iraq engagement provided the vital opening. The problem was the Arab states of the lower Gulf could not be comfortable associated with either Iraq or Iran. Iraq, although Arab, had always posed a threat to the more conservative Arab leaders. Iran was a complete outsider whom moderate Arabs viewed as an arrogant bully. With either of these two states incorporated into a Gulf security arrangement, the Gulf system would likely explode.

The Iran-Iraq war, by totally absorbing the concentration of the belligerents, allowed the lesser states of the Gulf to work out their security arrangements. Starting relatively small, the GCC over the course of the war has improved its defense posture until today it is somewhat formidable. Sophisticated weaponry, from AWACS to F-15's, have become an integral part of the GCC inventory. Chinese CSS II intermediate range missiles, although purchased against U.S. desires, also have helped to flush out the GCC power position.

It is now tempting to view the GCC as a successor to Iran, serving as America's surrogate. For obviously the

power vacuum that developed from the Shah's fall is still there. Moreover, the matters have been exacerbated by the fact that during the war all of the Gulf states participated in an ominous arms race. Who is to assume overall authority for the Gulf, which is now a virtual armed camp?

The GCC is at this time incapable of assuming a role as monolithic as that which is required to ensure continued western access to regional oil and to prevent the deleterious expansion of the Soviet Union's influence. Nonetheless, the GCC, being at "ground zero", does contribute to regional stability. Although it must continue to wrestle with its own internal and external problems, there exists no doubt that the GCC is - albeit cautiously - responsive to political nudging by the U.S. The Soviets would perhaps like to see the GCC dissolve so that each separate state can be individually "conquered". This probability gives serious justification to efforts the U.S. should take to ensure that the pursuit of a strong GCC alliance continues. To this end, there are a few questions that need definitive answers if a workable strategy is to be devised.

First, the U.S. must come to grips with the long-term role the GCC is to play in securing U.S. regional interests. Is there a role for the collective GCC or just one for the individual Gulf states? It appears that a piecemeal approach over the past few years has been the modus operandi. Bilateral agreements with the separate GCC states

have been the order, rather than bilateral agreements with the collective GCC. It is clear that continued support from Saudi Arabia remains the focus of U.S. efforts among the friendly Gulf Arabs, but there remains the question of the extent to which Saudi Arabia is capable of influencing GCC member states in supporting U.S. interests. For instance, why is it that no more than a modicum of U.S. basing rights has been achieved within the GCC? The indications are that Saudi Arabia's influence within the GCC in support of U.S. interests is limited.

Secondly, the U.S. must decide on the long-term relationship it desires with Iran and Iraq. If moderation is the plan, then efforts towards this end should be initiated immediately. If a major aim remains to contain the Soviets, the GCC should be encouraged to reconsider its option of allowing Iraq and Iran, if interested, to be members. Such a move would ensure U.S. control over the region by almost completely shutting out the Soviets, but it would also increase the problem of managing peace among formidable military forces. Letting Iran and/or Iraq into the GCC stands the risk of letting the "fox in with the chickens". The result might be much more disrupting than the existing arrangement.

Thirdly, if the Iran-Iraq GCC membership option is discounted, then the U.S. may need to consider building the military strength of the GCC to a point at which it becomes competitive with that of Iran and Iraq, and a real

deterrent to their regional assertion. The political ramifications of such a move are overwhelming. The problem is the Israel question. The implicit message of allowing a formidable GCC defense posture is the downgrading of Washington's commitment to Israel. Unless a critical change in Middle East politics (e.g., Israel/PLO peace) occurs, this consideration would be extremely hard to implement and likely to be "dead on arrival" at Congress.

Finally, the U.S. must weigh the long-term value of the regional arms race, of which it has been a part for two decades. The Soviets, Western Europe, China and the U.S. are among major contributors to the arms stockpile. There is overwhelming reason for the race to cease. With both Iran and Iraq in the process of recovering from their war efforts--militarily and politically--and with force reduction talks at the head of the superpower agenda, the time may be ripe for the U.S. to seize the initiative. Major weapons-exporting countries should be engaged in a dialogue that would lead to formal moderation in arms sales to Iran, Iraq and the GCC.

Rather than "twin pillars" based upon escalation, stability would be achieved on both sides of the Gulf through deescalation in the arms build-up to Iran, Iraq and the GCC. While this may seem to be an impossible proposal, definitive action to reduce proliferation must begin somewhere. It's a "pay me now or pay me later" dilemma. It will necessitate a collective, overt and well coordinated

broad diplomatic strategy.

There are several risks that such a strategy may incur. First, the GCC (as well as Iran and Iraq) may perceive a sense of isolation from Western Europe and from the superpowers. Fears of an oil embargo would naturally ensue, but in reality an embargo would be unlikely if all major oil recipients were party to a weapons moderation agreement. To whom would the Gulf deliver its oil? Secondly, there is the ever-present fear that Iran, and possibly Iraq, would use their available military resources still to attempt to impose their will upon neighboring Arab states. Although possible, such an initiative would be improbable because the convergence of interest between the U.S. and the Soviet union, in view of a weapons moderation agreement, would likely discourage such a move. As during the Iran-Iraq war, such convergence would help keep regional stability in check and U.S. vital national interest within grasp.

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